

Forum

VOL. 2. NO. 1.

AUGUST 1958

THE NEW FORUM

This is the first issue of a journal which, it is hoped, will help provide a useful link between party members; furnish information and ideas that will assist in a clearer understanding of the party's case; and generally provide material that will interest and stimulate the reader.

The last Inter-Party Journal, although it published much that was useful and worthwhile, unfortunately degenerated into an organ that was largely concerned with anti-party polemics and recrimination. In the later issues of the journal this trend was stopped but the damage had been done, and Forum foundered for lack of worthwhile material.

However, the party generally has always expressed itself in favour of the idea of an inter-party journal, and it is the aim of the editors to provide a journal which will meet the party's needs and wishes. There is a snag, though. If we are to carry out this task, we will need the support of the membership, as without such support, the journal will once again collapse.

The kind of support that we have in mind is firstly, members buying the journal, and secondly (although not in importance) contributions of a high standard that will make Forum readable and worth-reading. We hope that such support will be forthcoming and that members and branches will assist in providing material and increasing the circulation.

Finally a word to writers. If you have a typewriter, please type your contributions on foolscap (one side of the paper only), leaving a good margin on both sides. This will help to make the job of the committee much easier, and the task of producing a duplicated journal much less formidable.

We have done our best to make the paper attractive and readable, in spite of the drawback of duplication. It is hoped that at some time in the future, if support for this venture is forthcoming, we may revert to commercial printing. However, Conference has expressed the view (in our opinion quite justified) that Forum should be self-supporting. Hence the present format.

THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN FORUM ARE THOSE OF THE CONTRIBUTORS AND ARE NOT TO BE TAKEN AS
REPRESENTING THE POLICY OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

A SOCIALIST APPROACH TO HISTORY

Lecture Notes

by F. Evans.

Note on the World Map two things :-

1. That the bulk of land is in the northern hemisphere ; and that in the Southern hemisphere only the tapering tips of the continents extend into the temperate zone.

2. That of the inland seas, only the Mediterranean is central (midterranean) and warm; the Baltic and the Great Lakes of America are way out and cool.

71 Mankind was born, some 10,000 years before Christ, in some subtropical area of the Afro-Eurasian landmass, where sub-tropical abundance permitted survival without need to store or cultivate. During 90,000 years men slowly spread over the whole earth, and by about 10,000 B.C. most surviving peoples had acquired the New Stone Age techniques (polished arrowheads and scrapers, bored hammerheads, slings, needle-making, weaving, pottery, painting.) CIVILISATION arose (1-4 below) :

1. In the northern hemisphere (because the southern tips of continents were geographically isolated dead ends, and therefor social dead ends).

2. On the warm side of the temperate zone, where warmth was still enough for reasonable abundance, but seasonal cycle compelled first storage (e.g. grain) then production of crops hence production of surplus over immediate needs, thus promoting:-

- (a) Social division of labour - worker could support Priest, Soldier and administrative class.
- (b) Irrigation of land, building of granaries - developed engineering, architecture, mensuration and mathematics.
- (c) Exchange of products between communities - social cross-pollination

3. Within main river-catchment areas:

4. Where protected (against sudden attack) by mountain, sea and desert:-

Egypt - Abyssinian mts., Med., sea and eastern marshes.

India - Himalayas, Indian and Pacific oceans.

China - Tibetan massif, Gobi desert, Pacific ocean.

Civilisation was best promoted where protection fell short of isolation. Precocious Mediterranean (where plenty of shelter but also plenty of gateways at Suez, Dardanelles, Adriatic and Rhone-Rhine) contrasts with:-

- (1) Mexico and Peru (terminal isolation: "civilised" savages).
- (2) American Lakes and Baltic Sea (do. do.).
- (3) China and India (relative isolation : ossification into rigid mould of bureaucracy or religious caste).

The Mediterranean was the forcing house of civilisation not simply because it was at once compact and topographically varied, and had the widest range of weather and natural (?) products containing much energy in small bulk (especially oil and grain), but above all because it was the heart of the world's largest landmass, towards which all passes, rivers, and seaways led. It was a concert of cultures. Babylon, Egypt, Crete, Greece, Rome, cross-fertilised each other - rather, they produced each other : their successive rise marking the crest of the wave of civilisation moving northwest from the Red sea to the Baltic.

The character of each of the Mediterranean civilisations was conditioned by its special geographical features:-

Egypt: 1. Matured earliest, because it was most supremely sheltered and compact, and sited between two seas. contemporaneously (Mediterranean and Red).

2. Delta irrigation developed engineering (pulley, lever, screw) building (of granaries, e.g.) ; developed architecture (Pyramids) ; astronomy (for Nile flood prediction), developed mathematics.

3. Unnavigable cataract at Aswan hid secret of annual flooding, Abyssinian winter rainfall into upper Nile - hence the priest class (astronomers) dominated.

Babylon: 1. More open to attack (esp. northern nomads) hence soldier (War lords) tended to dominate priest.

2. Less geographically compact, so less political unity.

3. From 1 & 2 came the internecine war and continual oscillation between political hegemony and war-lord independencies.

Crete (Knossos): Island between Egypt and Greece, hence the first sea going/trading-bourgeois-middleman's civilisation (neither despotic nor mystic). Rise signifies that the commercial centre of gravity was shifting to the north. What does this mean?

stepping stones made them first fishers then traders (via Crete). The Rise of Greece signifies spreading of civilisation to the whole of the eastern Mediterranean, and Greece was now the centre of commercial gravity between North Africa and the European plains. Its fleet mastered the whole of the eastern Med., (and even colonised Marseilles, entry to Rhone/Rhine gap to Baltic). Greece converted barbarian communism to trading democracy (equality of commodities), but only on a small scale, independent city states (Sparta, Athens), because mountains divided.

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Rome: Dominance based on naval supremacy - "cleaned up" whole Med., trading area - the first colonial empire. Hence the need for: communications, (Roads, viaducts, pipes); to reinforce (or replace) local Tax-Collector Governors. Jurisprudence - codification of many systems of law and custom. Christianity - a hotchpotch of all religions so most easily adaptable to varying local needs. The rise of Rome signified the extension of trade/civilisation throughout the whole Mediterranean.

The gradual spreading of civilisation to the whole of the Mediterranean and beyond, was marked by the successive domination of Egypt and Babylon, of Crete Greece and Rome, but the growing point of this process, unseen and irresistible, were the products of production, which flow as inevitably as heat or water from areas of higher concentration to those of lower. For it is in the economically less developed areas that new markets can be developed to take the trading surpluses left over from the more saturated markets. New areas are brought into the cultural orbit of old empires, and into their cultural likeness insofar as their life is now shaped by the same artifacts. But (except where a people are destroyed by the violence or incompatibility of the intrusion) exchange of cultures tends to be mutual; there is a varying degree of organic fusion, sometimes so exquisitely complementary that they produce a new dramatic qualitative change. Each of the Mediterranean civilisations was notably of this character. In each case as with the barbarian hordes who "founded" Sparta, or the Latin warriors who "built" Rome - there was a mutual exchange of artifacts, physical or social, whose populations were fertile. (One simple instance of this was the introduction of iron into Greece, and the knowledge of its uses from the barbarian nomads who had discovered them in their wanderings over the northern plains of Europe; for it was a crucial element in final domination of Greece in the Aegean - it was the quality of Greek iron which defeated the sheer quantity of Persian bronze).

On a larger scale the marriage between the Roman Empire and Eurasian tribal communism (with the Baltic merchants as best man) produced Feudalism.

The decline of Rome is traditionally ascribed : (a) intercine struggles between its Eastern and Western Empires, and (b) to attack from without by Eurasian barbarians; but this description of events does not go below the surface to their growing, the more equal dispersion of productive power within the Empire (i.e. the growing wealth and power of local Governors), and the economic development of the Eurasian plains (i.e. the growing wealth and power of tribal leaders). The ever increasing mass of trade, exchange and money, gave

A slave economy could increase production only by arithmetical increase in the number of slaves ; it could not keep pace with the geometrical increase in markets except by a qualitative change in productivity, that is, by giving the slaves stake and status. Tribal communism could carry out its pillaging of Roman wealth (for which its appetite had been whetted by Roman traders) only by militarising the community, and the elective tribal leadership soon hardened into hereditary over-lordship, the communist version of Roman patrias.

Fusion of chattel slavery and communism produced feudalism, a balanced hierarchy of reciprocal rights and duties of great stability, and productively superior to slavery (a sort of social cannibalism) and to the nomad pastoralism-cum-plunder (for it provided, within the battlements of baronial 'protection' a settled and therefor intensive agriculture, with rotation of crops and winter foddering of herds).

The so called 'dark ages' were the evolution of communities more massive than hitherto - nation states compared with city states, world empires compared with the tiny Roman world - more massive territorially and in density of social artifact, and their growing point was the qualitatively higher productivity of feudalism to convert the oceans from a barrier into a highway, and shift the commercial high street from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, and finally Britain in turn "cleaned up" the oceans, Britain being the final victor because she stood athwart the gateway to the Baltic and (above all) was insulated from the Channel from attack. Behind these ramparts of water British agriculture and commerce could develop without the interruption of trampling armies; London and Bristol were the safest havens for merchants and their capital; Britain was continually being infused with rebellious, progressive fugitives from abroad (Huguenots, Jews, the oppressed of all nations).

Thus from Britain came the Mother of Parliaments, the secret ballot, universal franchise, rule of law, trial by jury, presumption of innocence, freedom of association, freedom of speech, habeus corpus and Hyde Park. There came also out of precocious industrialisation and its monstrous regiment of products hungrily seeking exchange, the first world empire, the rule Britannia, and the white man's burden.

In some respects America is Britain writ large - insulated by the great oceans, receptor of virile immigrants, the Mother of Plutocracies, the Big Brother of Pedlars, the Son of a Bomb. But as Bleriot and Wright once hopped the English channel, so now the I.C.B.M. hopscotches the oceans. From city states to Nation states to United States of America, of Europe, or Russia, China, India, and Africa, all in one tenth of the time man spent chipping flints and rubbing sticks. This progressive enlargement of the area of community has been made possible only by the development of the means of social cohesion - transport and communications, radio and Gallup, punched card and electronic devices for the instantaneous collection and transmission of data from and to large masses of people. This greater sensitivity of the social nervous system is perceived by the Old men who look back in anger (Priestley and Hoggart) as a steamrolling. A

that most of those purposes were snobbish; they are a hundred years from seeing that the breaking down of social differentials is a pre-requisite to the re-directing of militance to a new universal culture - socialism. They do not see the shadow of socialism in the fact that the capitalist power which 40 years ago was the most backward in the world has begun the navigation of the inland seas of outer space. So the little dog laughs (to see such fun) its fanged fleshless grin an epitaph to the violence of man's past, and to his obtuse backward-looking fixation of violence. But the climax is upon us, for now it is no longer a question of socialism or poverty, but of socialism or nothing.

NOTE

The announced article by Comrade Coster, being the first of a series on "Philosophy and Society" has had to be held over. It is hoped to publish this in a later issue.

The article by Comrade Ivimey on Sinclair Lewis has also been held over, due to pressure of space, and will appear in the next issue.

The contents of the next issue will be as follows (so far as possible) :-

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| The Party and Rent Control. | - by J. Trotman. |
| Value - continued. | - by E. Wilmott. |
| Philosophy and Society - I. | - by R. Coster. |
| Wealth and Commodities. | - by J. D'Arcy. |
| Writers and Society - Sinclair Lewis. | - by A. W. Ivimey. |

Please forward all contributions, correspondence and orders to I.P.J. Committee, S.P.G.B., 52, Clapham High Street, S.W.4., and make all remittances payable to E. Lake.

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Like Dame Quickly one does not quite know where to have value. Because the concept of value is not easy to understand one might begin by discussing what value is not before going on to explain what it is.

USE VALUE AND EXCHANGE VALUE

The commodity is the unit of wealth in capitalist society. The analysis of a commodity is then an analysis of the form wealth takes in such a society. "A commodity", wrote Marx, "has a two-fold aspect - use value and exchange value". All societies of course have produced use values which is only another way of saying that the purpose of production is consumption and capitalist society cannot of course be an exception.

Use values are then the prior impulse for men to produce and as such are an important adjunct to economics. That is why when economists say that Marx excluded use value entirely from economics they do not know what they are talking about.

Marx then did not say that use value could be left out of economics. What he did say was that it must be left out if we are to understand the nature of value. Let us follow Marx's own reasoning on the matter. Now use value is a relation - but it is a personal relation. A relation between the consumer and the object consumed whether it be buying a house or eating an ice cream. But the study of economic categories of which value is one, is not a personal affair but a social one. Economics being a social study it must involve society and society is something more than a number of individuals, - it is a number of individuals who form definite and stable relations, i.e. social relations. There are all sorts of relations but the one with which economics is concerned is the social relations of production.

That is why Marx saw that the understanding of economic categories must be sought not in personal but in social relations and for that reason he deliberately excluded utility from his investigation into the nature of value.

SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

By social relations of production we mean the way individuals stand to each other in the distribution of the social product - Master and slave - Overlord and serf - employer and wage worker. Since the advent of private property relations there has always been a class division between those who produce over and above their necessary upkeep and those who appropriate the surplus wealth. To each of this set of social relations there has corresponded a particular mode of production.

We must be careful however not to confuse social relations of production with the division of labour. While there is a necessary and important connection between them, they are not identical. Thus the essential feature of capitalism is not to be found in its division of labour but in a universal system of commodity production where labour - power itself is a commodity. The system itself was the outcome of a long historic process in which the peasant, craftsman and petty independent producer were divorced from their tools of production - an essential condition for the emergence of capitalism.

There has always been some kind of division of labour in human society but it has not always been tied to commodity production. There have been social organisations with division of labour which never produced a commodity. There can then be division of labour without commodity production although division of labour must itself be presupposed in commodity production. "Division of labour" - wrote Marx - "is a necessary condition for the production of commodities but it does not follow that the production of commodities is a necessary condition for the division of labour".

There will be division of labour in socialist society, corresponding to some extent to the productive organisation of present society but there will be no commodity production and hence - no value apart from use value. Nor will the social productive relations of socialism stem from the division of labour but from the fact that production will be consciously directed towards certain ends - production for use.

Again the division of labour in capitalism cannot be explained in terms of some principle of its own self-development - the error Evans made - but only in the set of social property relations where the self-expansion of capital and the appropriation of surplus value ever increases the technique-labour division for those ends. It is not the division of labour which revolutionises capitalism but the compulsions and needs of a mode of production which revolutionises the division of labour. In short the basic understanding of capitalism must be sought not in its division of labour but in its division of classes.

THE SOCIAL CHARACTER OF PRODUCTION

The division of labour does of course bring about the co-operation and inter-dependence of man's productive efforts. Adam Smith and economists today see this as the basis of 'progress' and the explanation of the social character of production. They fail or refuse to see that the social character of capitalist production has its roots and mainspring in its social relations. What gives capitalism its universal character is not its division of labour but its universal commodity production where men produce use values not for themselves but for others. Where they are compelled to work for others and where the worth of their labour is regulated and determined by a social process independant of their individual whims and wishes and as a consequence via the market they can only be wise after the advent.

The specific social character of the capitalist mode of production brings about then the necessary division of labour to give adequate expression for it.

The social character of capitalist production impresses on each product a social stamp, not because they are articles of utility but because it is an article of wealth to be exchanged for other articles of wealth - they are commodities, in which each has a value in exchange for another value or other values.

When we speak of exchange of commodities we always refer to two or more commodities. Each commodity itself has however as we have seen a social stamp and each commodity is therefore an embodiment of value and so possesses value which the exchange does not create but only realises. What the act of exchange does is to reveal how much value there is in a commodity compared with another or to put it more precisely it shows the quantitative ratio between commodities - how much of this for that. Just as things have weight before we put them on the scale, it is only by doing so that we find out how much weight.

EXCHANGE SOCIETY AND EXCHANGE VALUE

When economists talk about exchange society what is meant is that exchange has become a means of regularising the purpose of production which is the production of commodities. It is only in a social organisation where commodities are produced that an article of wealth comes to possess not only a use value but a value exchangeable for another value - or values. In less developed or simple commodity production it was a relation between commodity owners, i. e. the guilds, craftsmen, small producers who owned the tools of production and so owned the product. To put another way it was a relation between the producers themselves.

In modern capitalism it is a relation between the owners of the commodity labour power and those who by virtue of productive ownership are able to appropriate the commodities produced by the activity of labour power. A social relation summed up by Marx as a relation between wage labour and capital.

Now as it already has been stated commodity production presupposes exchange and what is termed exchange value appears at first sight to be a quantitative relation between things, i.e. between the commodities themselves and so it seems no more to do with social relations than use value. Marx's treatment of this however gives us the key to his concept of value. This quantitative ratio between things is merely the phenomenal or exterior form of a relation between men and what those relations are has already been summarised.

We may however state it in a slightly different way by saying that the production of things, i.e. commodities, are

themselves the products of men who stand to each other in a certain way for the realisation of certain productive ends. In simple commodity production it was a relation between the producers themselves, taking their share of the social product via the means of exchange. In modern capitalism, commodity production fulfills the purpose of owners of capital appropriating part of the sum of values created by workers, i.e. unpaid labour in the form of surplus value.

So we can say that the production of value and its corollary, surplus value is the expression of the purpose of production under given historical conditions where this purpose is given effect by certain men, the owners of capital. And this means that other men stand in a certain relation to them as non-owners. So the production of commodities as embodiments of value is in reality a relation between men. And because value can only be realised through exchange, that is between one commodity and another, it manifests itself as a relation between things - commodities.

Value then is a characteristic, property, or quality of a given form of production - commodity production. As such each commodity must have this quality. Now utility is a quality given by concrete specific labour on nature given material. But it is a quality inherent in the physical or tangible make up of the commodity or service, itself. Value on the other hand is a social quality the embodiment of social production and inherent in a given set of social productive relations and when we talk of value being a quality of a given historic form of production it is the same as saying value is a relation between men.

In conclusion although we have referred to exchange value we were wrong. As Marx says a commodity is a use value and a value. As a utility it is the general form of wealth production in all social life. On the other hand value itself is the outcome of historic development. A specific form which presupposes a sufficiently developed form of the division of labour and private ownership of wealth resources. So when we talk of exchange value we really mean the act of exchange whereby the social quality - value - quantitatively manifests itself.

NOTE: In the next issue we shall deal with the quantitative aspect of value - not to be confused with exchange value - social labour - and what Marx means by social labour as the substance of value. This has not only theoretical importance but practical application.

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Many books of today are rated by the shining critics of the shining literary weeklies to be realistic in their portrayal of modern working class life. This view is endorsed wholeheartedly by the many followers of the critics; half-hearted by the readers who have no idea of working class life; and hopefully by the working class readers who believe what they read because it would be nice if it were true.

Occasionally books are written that deal with characters and situations of working class life with accuracy and vividness; they deal with real people and real places, standing the test of time, which is the test of quality. Usually such writers as Tressell, Lawrence, and Britton are discussed as far as this aspect of English literature is concerned, but few writers come near to this class in recent years.

Dylan Thomas is one of those few. Despite the fact that he is primarily known as a poet, his prose works are outstanding in their descriptions of the contemporary working class way of life, and close to genius in their style and communication.

Thomas had a short life, but he leaves behind him tales of phenomenal capacity for sex and alcohol. He also leaves behind him great writing. However, his many literary post-mortems nearly all direct their efforts in the examination of his former activities, providing pages of interesting dialogue concerned with what he told the professors to do during a lull in after-dinner conversation, but rarely crediting him with any qualities as a writer of any significance.

He was born in South Wales in 1914, became a reporter on a local newspaper, then went to London. He wrote poetry and stories, became famous, went to America several times in the space of time from 1950 until 1958, and finally died there in November 1958 at the age of 39 (generally because he drank too much). Any one of his present literary imitators would probably describe his life as "fierce and brilliant as the flare of a match".

He was acclaimed, largely posthumously, as a great poet. He is occasionally mentioned with deep reverence in the columns of all the state literary journals. His collected poems, 1934-1958 have sold many copies, and everybody knows that he wrote a funny play called "Under Milk Wood".

This article is concerned with the prose writings of Dylan Thomas. They can be counted on one hand; "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog", "Quite Early Morning", "A Prospect of the Sea", "Adventures

in the Skin Trade" (unfinished), several short stories, and a film scenario "The Doctor and the Devils". "Under Milk Wood" however cannot be categorized as prose or poetry, it is as Thomas said, simply a play for voices.

Many people who think about such things as whether or not a book reflects a true picture of society, or of people themselves, regard Thomas sceptically. Although he was a poet, with disdain for politics and the cruder facets of democracies far and wide, he seldom pushed any form of reasoning, political or spiritual, into his works, though of course here and there he dabbles with 'these-works-are-for-God-Almighty-and-I-would-be-a-bloody-fool-if-they-weren't' attitude towards life. His writing is never subordinated to a political issue as in some other works of the same nature by different writers.

"Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog", (the title an example of Thomas's satirical gifts) is a collection of ten short stories concerned with reflections on his early life. The connection of the title with Joyce's work "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" is the only common ground the two books have, styles and content differ, though they both refer to the same thing.

Thomas is rather cynical in his attitude towards his childhood, illustrated by the opening sentence of one of the stories:-

"One afternoon, in a particularly bright and glowing August, some years before I knew I was happy, George Hooping, whom we called Little Cough, Sidney Evans, Dan Davies, and I sat on the roof of a lorry, travelling to the end of the Peninsula. It was a tall, six wheeled lorry, from which we could sit on the roofs of the passing cars and throw our apple stumps at women on the pavement. One stump caught a man on a bicycle in the middle of the back, he swerved across the road, for a moment we sat quiet and George Hooping's face grew pale. And if the lorry runs over him, I thought calmly as the man on the bicycle swayed towards the hedge, he'll get killed and I'll be sick on my trousers and perhaps on Sidney's too, and we'll all be arrested and hanged, except George Hooping who didn't have an apple."

This short passage indicates the quality of his writing; in a moment he has set the scene, flamboyant and simple, and after his initial statement that it was before he knew he was happy, he brings the reader along the road on top of the lorry and in a moment paints a picture of sudden childish fear.

The ten stories of the book deal with his life before he joins a Welsh local newspaper, and his gradual development from infancy until adolescence. It is all done with a masterly ease. The influences and shaping factors of his youth are included, graphic and real.

Thomas's other collections of short stories largely follow this

little more bitter. "Adventures in the Chin Trade" is an unfinished novel, described by him as something of a pot-boiler. It deals with a young man leaving his home town in Wales and travelling to London, largely autobiographical in its outline, but particularly intense in its descriptions of the boy's final break with family ties. Despite the fact that the work is unfinished, it is complete in itself, a bitter story with glimpses of humour, and episodes of sex and drink that are perhaps an indication of the author's preoccupations.

Dylan Thomas did not live in the working class milieu of Tressell or the others who are usually quoted as writers about people worth reading. His life was not affected to such a great extent by major industry or the conditions of pit and factory of D.H.Lawrence, but his writings reflect a way of life that is none the less proletarian, but rather the subdued atmosphere of crummy offices and grammar school petty snobberies, developing into the land of the public bar and the lonely street.

"Under Milk Wood", his most well-known work has been staged many times in America, broadcast several times on the B.B.C., staged at the New Theatre, London, and has recently been televised. It is a masterpiece of writing. Originally meant as a play for voices called "Lloreggub Hill" (the first word of course can be read backwards), but was renamed "Under Milk Wood" when Thomas later thought the joke 'small and childish'.

It is concerned with a small Welsh fishing village and its inhabitants. It reveals all the petty snobberies, hates, loves, jealousies, humour and poverty of the 66 characters who bring the play to life. The underlying trend is bitterness, despite the superficial humour and wittiness. The characters are grotesquely real, exaggerated now and then to illustrate particular aspects of small-town working class life. On the stage most of the characters appear together, with bedroom, balcony, kitchen and public bar, all forming a complete picture. Each character is a piece of the bawdy jig-saw puzzle.

Dylan Thomas the eccentric, is now the subject for discussion among his literary biographical best-sellers. John Brinnin writes about him in America, his wife Caitlin about his home life. Both present a picture of a man of genius and a man so preoccupied with drink, sex, and death that he becomes a strange eccentric. Dylan Thomas expresses all this in his writing, but what is more important, he writes of real life - never of the superficial identifications of modern "intellectual" best-sellers. Although it was a life he never got to the bottom of, many of his observations are poignantly true. His books will not be forgotten as long as there are little boys like little dogs who look in mirrors and see themselves.

THE PARTY AND RENT CONTROL

Recently, some criticism was expressed in the party of articles which appeared in the "Socialist Standard" dealing with the question of Rent Control. At the request of the E.C., the Editorial Committee produced a statement setting out what they considered to be the party's position on the matter.

We are publishing this statement (with certain amendments) in these pages as this is clearly a matter of vital interest to members, and the statement itself is one which should prove a valuable re-affirmation of the party's case on reforms. In the next issue will appear a criticism of the Editorial Committee's views, and of course, any other contributions on the subject will be appreciated.

Editorial Committee.

THE PARTY'S ATTITUDE TO RENT CONTROL

In response to some discussion within the Party we were asked by the E.C. to deal with the proposition that the Party should support rent control. This proposition was put in the following form:-

"I agree that Rent Control benefits the employers, "it also benefits the workers, and in that case "should be supported by Socialists and by the "Socialist Party."

This proposition means that we should now abandon a principle on which the Party was formed and add to our objective of abolishing capitalism and establishing socialism, an "immediate demand", a measure for the reform of capitalism.

The Contention that the Party has never taken a decision on Rent Control

We were asked for evidence that a Party Conference or Party Poll had ever decided the Party's attitude on Rent Control, and whether the Party had ever decided if rent control could or could not benefit the workers. The member concerned stated:-

"Your reply confirms what I have always thought "that the Party has no attitude as to whether Rent Control could be in working class interests..."

The E.C. had already pointed out that, over a large number of years, in the "Socialist Standard" and in Party pamphlets (the latter read and approved by the E.C. before publication) the uselessness of rent control from the point of view of the workers' real wages had been consistently maintained because the evidence showed that rent control had been designed to discourage wage increases and had had that effect. The reply received was that the decisions of past Executive Committee's are not Party decisions.

This is a completely erroneous view. Each year the

Conference and the Delegate Meeting review and decide on the work of the E.C. during the year. The fact that no Conference or Delegate Meeting has ever rejected the E.C.'s attitude on rent control (and as far as we know no Branch has ever raised the question at Conferences or directly with the E.C.) is complete justification for holding that the Party fully endorsed the E.C.'s attitude. To argue that "no action" by Conference or Party Poll means that a question is undecided, would mean that some of the fundamental principles of the Party have never been decided. In particular we have been unable to discover any conference of the Party that passed a resolution preventing the Party from having a list of reforms or immediate demands. No such resolution was ever passed or even proposed, because the Party was founded in protest against the S.D.F.'s belief that a Socialist Party could remain socialist if it had a programme of immediate demands for reforms. At the founding of the Party no members thought it necessary to table a proposition so completely in opposition to the Party's stand as laid down in the D. of P.

The second issue of the "Socialist Standard" (October 1904) contained an Editorial on the "Futility of Reform", explaining the Party's opposition to "immediate demands". If the suggestion made was correct this editorial could be disregarded because Conference had not passed a resolution on it.

The issue of benefit to the working class.

As indicated above, the comrade concerned thinks that the issue is whether or not this particular reform could be of benefit to the workers; and as he holds that it is of benefit he thinks that the Party is therefore under obligation to support it.

This is quite beside the point in relation to the Party's attitude at its foundation. The Party did not take the stand that it was opposed to having a programme of useless social reforms but should have a programme of reforms held to be of benefit to the working class. The Party took the stand that it would have no immediate demands. It repudiated on principle the S.D.F. policy of immediate demands (one of which incidentally was the demand for low rented houses). Among the reasons why the Party was opposed in principle to supporting reforms were that to do so would attract reformists into the ranks of the Party and submerge its Socialist objective; and that no amount of reform legislation would alter the class character of capitalism or the position of the working class. It was also shown that efforts devoted to strengthening the socialist movement would have more effect in extracting concessions from the capitalist class than any reform agitation as they would, through fear of socialism, seek to keep workers from turning to it. These points were continually made in the earliest issues of the "S.S.".

The Facts about Rent Control.

The first important fact about Rent Control is that no Government in this country has ever had a policy of rent control designed simply to keep rents from rising. The Tories and Liberals who started rent control and the Tories and Labourites who have continued it, did so in connection with, and as part of, a policy of preventing wage increases; either by act of Parliament or by Defence Regulations, or by the policy of "wage restraint". That was the declared purpose and that was the

Indeed the comrade concerned apparently agrees that this is so for he writes: "I agree that rent control benefits the employers".

It is indeed difficult to discover from the comrade's letters in what way he thinks that rent control does benefit the workers, although he does give what he mistakenly regards as one of its advantages. He writes:-

"Another advantage of rent control is that the worker "has the protection of the County Court. If he is "unfortunate to fall in arrears with his rent he can't "be thrown out in the Street by the landlord; the Court "in almost all cases allows him to pay off his arrears. "If there is a legal limit to rents, the worker can't "be put out in order that the landlord can let his "house to a higher paid worker and by that means "increase his profit".

It will be observed from this that what is meant by the proposition that the Party should support Rent Control is not just some abstract generalisation but that the Party should support the actual legislation, the Rent Control Acts.

He is however wrong in his conception of the law. Even if we assume that having to pay rent arrears, but being able to pay them after the due date, is a material advantage, this has nothing to do with rent control as such. Laws enabling Courts to delay eviction for non-payment of rent could operate without any control of rents. It is apparently suggested that we should support a demand for such laws.

It is also important to observe that the proposition that the Party should support Rent Control would in fact mean opposing both the Tory Rent policy and the Labour Party Rent policy, because under both policies rents will be increased, and under both policies all or most houses will eventually be outside rent control (The Labour policy of having houses taken over by local Councils, repaired, and the rents raised, also involves removing the houses from rent control because Council houses are outside control). Also Councils likewise evict tenants who do not pay their rent.

One of the invariable weaknesses of all reform proposals is also indicated in the letter received: they all mean trying to help only some of the workers. The "higher paid" workers who want to get into houses (possibly out of a higher rented house) would not regard legislation which prevents them from doing so as a benefit to them.

No Parallel with the struggle in the Industrial Field

The E.C. on 12th November passed a following resolution informing the comrade concerned:

"that as the Party is opposed to rent and the existence "of a landlord class, they cannot support rent control",

to which they received the reply:-

In reply to your brief letter I shall also be brief. Firstly because the Party is opposed to the wages system - "does this prevent the Party from being in favour of higher wages "for the working class. Secondly does this prevent the Party "from being opposed to wage reductions".

This again indicates a failure to understand the fundamental stand made by the Party at its foundation, its insistence on recognition of the class struggle as the necessary basis for a Socialist Party. On the one hand the Party rejected the idea of a programme of "immediate demands" for social reform legislation but equally insisted that the workers must under capitalism struggle on the industrial field, this being one aspect of the class struggle.

The fact that the Party agrees that the workers must struggle against their employers on the industrial field does not in any way conflict with the Party's opposition to campaigning for social reform legislation. The former enables the Party to point out to striking workers the necessity to gain control of the political machinery on the basis of a socialist mandate to abolish capitalism and establish socialism. The latter is in direct conflict with the Party's Socialist objective since it necessarily involves either trying to get into Parliament on a reformist mandate, or trying to influence governments of capitalism by political campaigning for social reforms, among the electors.

Point is added to this by the fact that all of the governments in this country that have supported rent control legislation have coupled it with a demand (or legislation) aimed to prevent the workers from taking industrial action to gain higher wages.

Proportion of Worker's wages spent on Rent

The comrade concerned stated that before rent control "the workers paid more out in rent from their wages than they did when rent control was brought in". This is quite correct, but the significance of it is obviously not realised by this member.

Spending a smaller proportion of wages on rent means of course spending a larger proportion on food, clothing, travel to work and other things and this is what happened between 1914 and 1920, and after 1939.

The logic of it is (and various social reformers seized on it to give weight to other reform demands) that the Party should support social reform demands for reducing the proportion of wages spent on food, or on clothing or on travel etc. by demanding price controls or subsidies on food, or clothing or travel. (The latest reform demand, endorsed by a Trade Union, is that all travel to and from work should be "free" and that all workers should have 2/6d a week deducted from their wages to pay for it. And one of the reform demands of members of the S.D.F. was that all food should be free).

What has been overlooked is that in the period of Labour Government, 1945- 1951 when the proportion of wages spent on rent was falling because wages were rising while rent and rates

rose hardly at all, the workers total purchasing power was falling because of the success of the Labour Government in dissuading workers from pressing wage claims in a period of rising cost of living. They used rent control to reinforce their wage restraint campaign. Wage restraint in spite of the rising cost of living was explicitly declared to be Labour Government policy by the late Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1949.

Summary and Conclusion

We would reiterate that the facts about rent control and its joint policy of wage restraint demonstrate that the employers have benefited from it through being able to pay lower wages than they would otherwise have had to pay. The critic makes no attempt to meet this and indeed apparently accepts it as a fact.

Nor does this Comrade attempt to deal with the reason why Tories and Labourites are both committed to higher rents; the fact that rent control has so increased the delapidation of enormous numbers of working class houses that its continuation on the old basis is admitted by both parties to be impossible (In addition the Tories are now opposed to rent control because, with some rents controlled and others not controlled workers could not be induced to move into new areas where all rents are uncontrolled and this "immobility of labour" interferes with production).

Nor does he deal with the facts that delapidated and near slum housing resulting from rent control is clearly not in the interest of the working class (On his line of argument the Party should also support slum clearance and higher rents).

While it is obviously not necessary to re-affirm the Party's attitude against supporting social reform legislation, it can do nothing but good that Party members to whom the original controversies may not be familiar, should be reminded of the principles on which the Party was formed.

At the last conference, considerable discussion took place on the quality of the party's propaganda journal, and the prospects of improving it. Hackney branch, who was one of the branches who raised the matter, issued a circular putting forward their views on this and we are reproducing this circular here as we think that it is worthy of a wider circulation than merely to branches and delegates alone. In any event it is likely to prove of assistance to members when the matter is dealt with at a party meeting. It is hoped that by the time the next issue is published, further contributions will have been received which will appear in these pages.

Editorial Committee

THE "SOCIALIST STANDARD"

More and more, the future of the Socialist Party's propaganda lies in the written word. There is no need to elaborate this; the decline of street-corner meetings and debates, and even the highway-planners' threat to Hyde Park, emphasize how much rests in Party pamphlets and leaflets and most of all, of course, in the "Socialist Standard".

The purpose of this statement is to say clearly and unequivocally that the "Socialist Standard" is not good enough; that, in fact, in fundamentally important respects it is very poor indeed. This has been said, in varying ways and with varying degrees of directness, at Conference after Conference in recent years by members and Branches. Always, the Party has accepted the reply that the "Standard" as it is is the best which can be got from limited human and financial resources.

We challenge this. We say that if it is true, if nothing better can be done, then the Party is touching rock bottom. That is not to denigrate the consistent excellence of a few regular contributors to the "Standard". On the contrary, their unvarying readability and informativeness underlines the point we are making; they should be writing in a good paper.

We think the "Socialist Standard" to-day is not a good paper, and we are asking other members to support us in asking urgently that enquiries be made and steps be taken to make something better of it - and we ask this because we believe that the Party can do better. Our case is that the "Standard" to-day is to all appearances without a policy; that, the immediate exceptions made, its contributions made are without ideas and even knowledge; that the standard of writing is pitifully, shamefully low; that its appearance and arrangement damn it; and finally, that in the last few years attempts to train writers or to make even a little organised use of them have been virtually none.

First, most important of all, the policy. What is the policy of the "Socialist Standard"? Has it ever been published or even stated? There is, in fact, a general aimlessness about the "Standard" that has spread in the last two or three years. Nobody seems to know for whom it is written or with

what object in view. One body of Party opinion wants it simple, bright, topical and jolly; short words only, please, to help the canvassors in Week-end Mail country. Others want it appealing to the "intelligentsia"; yet others seek it written for Party members, and still others for anyone but Party members.

The purpose behind the "Standard" is equally undefined, equally nebulous, equally open to a dozen surmises. To convert the heathen? To comment and review? To inform or elucidate, to give facts or simplify them? Or is it just hell-bent to state the Party's case? Our view is that the "Standard" should be written for Socialists, and its aim should be to give a tip-top Socialist commentary on the world and things around us. If it is interesting for Socialists, it will be equally so to the public we would like to attract. But our concern at the moment is that the "Standard" now has no discernible policy at all. Not there. *Virgo intacta*. Ain't got none.

Lack of knowledge and ideas; this is not said lightly. What is there to be said for the endless five-minute chats on Socialism, four-minute addresses to the working class, three minute indictments of Gaitskell? Or here is Comrade X, writing up the new revelations in a communist pamphlet published ten years before; or Comrade Z with a new feature called "Bits & Pieces" to go with "Odds and Ends", "Passing Comments", and "Notes by the Way". There blows Comrade Y reviewing a book on a subject he knows little about by an established authority and calling it superficial, and another member shaking the readers with the news that a certain industry is run for profit.

It might be remembered that even all that silly correspondence on religion was in fact evoked by an equally silly article - ill-informed and contrary to the Socialist case - in the "Standard". The Editorial Committee's known view is that articles cannot be excluded unless they say something wrong. Well, some of them do say things which are wrong; but more and more of them say nothing wrong because they say - nothing.

The standard of writing, the actual presentation of things in words, is as poor (with certain exceptions) as could be found anywhere at all. Don't tell us it doesn't matter. It does. Cliche-sodden, hackneyed phrases; bad grammar; poor constructions all the manifestations of inability to write decently, let alone well, are all too common in the "Standard". Yet if the "Standard" is going to come up to our needs as the spearhead of our propaganda it must be well written. Who, in the Party or out of it, wants to read or is impressed by badly written stuff?

That goes with equal strength for the layout of the "Standard". The shoddy impoverished-looking paper is bad enough, but made worse by the complete absence of any attempt to make the most of it by imaginative design. The flung-together look of it all; articles begin at the tops of pages only by accident, may break off to be continued in all kinds of places, show no interest taken in making them look attractive. The meaningless front page list; who is drawn to buy by the allure of "Party News Briefs", "About Books" or "Notes by the Way"? There is no question of opinion here: this is something we can do something about.

Are the people immediately responsible - the E.C. and the Editorial Committee - doing anything to make the "Standard" better or looking to its future in any way? They are not. There has been no writers' class for two or three years; but, in any case, the writers' classes that have been run in recent years have produced no writers. This may not be the fault of those running the class (on the other hand it may be; can we find out?), but the fact remains. What would be said of a speakers' class that produced no speakers?

Not is any attempt made to obtain articles or to organize in even a mild way the services of the regular writers. We asked regular writers if they were ever asked to co-operate or to write on particular subjects, and the answer was virtually never - that the committee presumably hoped or waited for what might turn up each month.

We claim that the "Socialist Standard" is an inferior paper today, and we appeal to the Party membership to do something about it. The Party can produce a first-class "Standard". We think the Editorial Committee should lay down standards and refuse articles which do not come up to them. We want something done to produce fresh writers and provide for the future, and something to cohere the month-by-month material of the "Standard", and attention paid to the appearance of it. Most of all, we want a policy for the "Standard". The lack of policy may be the greatest factor, indeed, in the poor quality of the articles. for how can writers work without knowing to what purpose, for whom, or by what standards they are writing?

We are not offering positive proposals here: that is not our point. We are asking that the entire question of the "Socialist Standard" be investigated; by the E.C., by the Branches, by a Party meeting - the means does not matter so long as the investigation is thorough. Until now we have always accepted the reply that the "Standard" is the best that can be done: and while we have gone on accepting it, the best has gone from poor to worse. We want it to be the best, and we believe it can be done.

Fraternally,
Hackney Branch

Comrades,

For the past six months I have concentrated on distributing back issues of the S.S. over a fairly wide area on British Railways trains, cafeterias and waiting rooms.

Briefly, my method is to tuck an S.S. one quarter behind the mirror (where nearly all cccs wander) in the train toilets, and also on luggage racks and seats, and waiting room and cafeteria tables, etc. Also used are the free "Introductory" leaflets and "Trade Union", etc.

This form of propaganda depends mainly on two conditions; one, the ability to give away something for nothing, and secondly the ability to move around daily whilst collecting filthy lucre for fares, rent and snacks!

In my own particular case I try to remain Outside the factories, selling from the bag, which gets harder as time goes on. So much so that it is quite within the foreseeable future when I may be forced to remain static and stop the daily grind of train-catching as a method of living under capitalism. With this in view I am passing on this information to younger members who may be interested in carrying on this type of propaganda which I am convinced is well worth-while from my observation of results.

To keep moving under capitalism is to increase one's chances of selling (whatever one is selling in the daily struggle), by contacting potential customers here and there and roundabout over as wide a field as possible. It follows from this that to place the Socialist Standard under as many working class noses as possible at the same time, calls for only a tiny extra effort, and at the least will always make more citizens aware of our existence.

Any criticism or suggestions on the above will be welcomed.

Cordially and Fraternally,

G. R. Russell.

Central Branch.